

Aylesbury College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in the work they inspect. A member of the Council's audit service works with inspectors in assessing aspects of governance and management. All colleges are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

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Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report.* Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.
Sample size: 122 college inspections

Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

Summary

Aylesbury College

Eastern Region

Inspected January 1998

Aylesbury College is a general further education college located on two sites in Aylesbury. Its first self-assessment report, together with its action plan, was produced in 1997. The annual planning cycle of the college links the self-assessment process and its outcomes with the development of the operational plan. The provision of clear referenced evidence enabled the inspection team to substantiate all the judgements and grades reached by the college for its cross-college provision. There was less agreement about curriculum area grades. Inspectors concluded that the college had overestimated the quality of some areas and underestimated it in others.

The college offers provision in all 10 of the FEFC's programme areas. Six programme areas were inspected together with aspects of cross-college provision. The six programme areas were awarded eight grades. The curriculum is well managed. Individual support for students is strong. Inspectors concluded that there are: productive links with industry and local schools; good levels of additional learning support; effective procedures for recording and monitoring students' progress; high pass rates

for students on some courses; improved quality assurance arrangements; effective communications throughout the college; and productive working relationships between governors and senior managers. The college should address: the low levels of achievement on GCE A level and some vocational courses; poor levels of retention on some vocational courses; the unreliable data on students' achievements; the inadequate library facilities at Hampden Hall; the limited use of targets and standards to measure quality improvements; and the monitoring of college charter commitments.

The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are given below.

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Construction	3	Support for students	2
Engineering	2	General resources	3
Business	2	Quality assurance	3
Health and social care	3	Governance	2
Hairdressing and beauty	2	Management	3
English, sociology, psychology and law	4		
Languages	2		
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3		

The College and its Mission

1 Aylesbury College, founded in 1962, is a medium-sized further education college. It draws most of its students from Aylesbury Vale which covers the central part of Buckinghamshire. The college operates on a main site close to the town centre, and a second site, Hampden Hall, about three miles away, which includes a 280 acre farm. Within reasonable travelling distance there are further education colleges at Amersham, Dunstable, Oxford, Milton Keynes, Hemel Hempstead and Thame. In addition, within the college's catchment area, there are 16 local education authority (LEA) maintained schools and two grant-maintained schools, all with sixth forms. Buckinghamshire LEA operates a selective system of secondary education with transfer at 12 years of age. The Sir Henry Floyd Grammar School lies adjacent to the main site of the college and there is shared access to the two sites. There are also four schools providing education for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the area. The LEA operates an adult education service in the town of Aylesbury and in other centres in the surrounding rural area.

2 The population of Aylesbury Vale in 1991 was 146,000. Aylesbury, the county town of Buckinghamshire, has a rapidly developing local economy with a population of 55,000 which is expected to grow to 80,000 by the year 2011. New shopping complexes, office blocks and housing have contributed to the continued expansion of the town. Minority ethnic groups form 8.6 per cent of the population in the town of Aylesbury. The largest employers in the town of Aylesbury are the health authority, local government and financial services sectors. The fastest growth in employment between 1986 and 1996 has been in the retail and distribution sectors. Unemployment was 1.8 per cent during the late autumn of 1997 and there were also a significant number of vacancies.

3 At the time of the inspection, there were 948 full-time and 4,819 part-time student enrolments.

The college met its Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funding targets in 1994-95, 1995-96 and 1996-97. The college has developed contracted provision with Thames Valley Enterprise, its local training and enterprise council (TEC), the European Social Fund and other funding organisations.

4 The main areas of course provision reflect employment opportunities in the college's travel-to-work area and are extended as new employment patterns develop. The college also collaborates with a range of partners to offer programmes for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Partnerships with a number of local higher education establishments support higher level courses in management, teacher training, access and higher national certificates and/or diplomas. The college also provides education programmes for Grendon and Spring Hill prisons.

5 The curriculum is delivered through eight programme teams led by programme managers. Within each programme team courses are grouped in sections. There are 132 full-time lecturers, including fractional appointments, and 109 staff supporting the work of the college in administrative, technical and clerical positions. Ninety-six per cent of lecturers are on new contracts of employment.

6 The college reviewed its mission in 1997 and its role concentrates, although not exclusively, on 'vocational education and training to meet the needs of the developing local economy, and to support the achievement of the national targets for education and training'.

7 The college's strategic objectives are geared towards:

- meeting the needs of a wide range and increasing number of students
- constantly improving the quality and flexibility of provision
- maximising the cost effectiveness of college services.

Context

The Inspection

8 The college was inspected during the week beginning 26 January 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997. These were checked by the inspectorate against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors for a total of 55 days and an auditor working for five days. They observed 86 lessons, and examined students' work and college documents. Inspectors and the auditor met governors, managers, college staff and students.

9 Of the lessons inspected, 63 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 7 per cent were less than satisfactory or poor. This compares with 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all lessons inspected during 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief Inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 66 per cent which is below the average for the sector expressed in the same report. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	1	9	6	0	0	16
GCSE	0	0	2	1	0	3
GNVQ	0	2	2	1	0	5
NVQ	1	16	9	1	0	27
Other vocational	7	18	7	2	1	35
Total	9	45	26	5	1	86

Curriculum Areas

Construction

Grade 3

10 Twelve lessons were observed, including practical and theory lessons for students enrolled on full-time and part-time courses. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, although they considered that the significance of the strengths and weaknesses was understated. The self-assessment report does not contain sufficient quantitative data to support its judgements.

Key strengths

- high pass rates on intermediate and advanced courses
- good monitoring and recording of students' progress
- effective links with industry and local schools
- flexible arrangements for attendance

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses
- poor student attendance and punctuality
- some workshops too small for the number of students
- many handtools in need of replacement
- poor health and safety practice

11 There is a wide range of construction courses, including general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) foundation studies and NVQs levels 2 to 3 in brickwork, painting and decorating, wood occupations, and electrical installation. Specialist advanced short courses for gas installation meet a specific student and employer need. A notable feature of provision is the flexible arrangements for attendance. Students are able to enrol on courses throughout the year. There are insufficient training courses

at technician level; there is only one course at foundation level. There are productive links with industry and local schools. The college runs a number of wood machining courses for employees from a large chain of department stores. The college's construction curriculum centre successfully promotes the industry to schools by addressing aspects of the national curriculum. These strengths were not recorded in the self-assessment report. A recently-introduced system of notifying employers or parents of students' absence appears to be working effectively. Induction packs meet the needs of students. The standard of course leaflets is good.

12 An appropriate variety of teaching methods is used to promote learning and motivate students. Clear briefings are given to students. As identified in the self-assessment report, students were generally motivated and good at organising their own learning. Most students have a clear understanding of the purpose of their studies. The skills and knowledge acquired by students is appropriate to their level of study. Students' work was marked consistently but teachers' feedback comments were not always informative enough to help students improve their work. The teaching of key skills is not included in all courses. Some good industrial projects are undertaken by students in the college and local community. In a few lessons, students were disruptive and hindered the learning of others. Some teaching did not maintain students' interest. In a few lessons, students spent too long copying notes. Many lesson plans consist of topic lists and do not address the individual learning needs of students.

13 Effective communication is promoted through regular and well-organised team meetings. Action plans lack clarity and measurable targets. Arrangements to review the quality of teaching and learning are not sufficiently rigorous. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The

Curriculum Areas

written policies on safety are comprehensive. However, inspectors did not agree with the programme area's assessment of health and safety practice. There are examples of poor health and safety practice in workshops resulting in the use of inappropriate footwear, and bricklaying students not wearing eye protection while cutting bricks. There is little control over substances hazardous to health in the workshops and risk assessment documentation is inadequate.

14 Staff are effectively deployed. Teachers lack recent industrial experience. Teachers keep up to date through regular staff development activities. The stock of library books is satisfactory. Classrooms are of adequate size and layout but are drab in appearance and often lack any coherent identity. The carpentry and joinery workshop is untidy. Insufficient technician support and workshops in painting and decorating, plumbing and brickwork which are too small, adversely affect students' learning. Many handtools and several overhead projectors need replacing. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

15 The monitoring and recording of students' progress and destinations is thorough. Students' retention and pass rates are high on

advanced and intermediate vocational courses. Retention on NVQ courses is satisfactory but pass rates are poor and the college's self-assessment report does not acknowledge this. Poor levels of students' attendance and punctuality are recognised by the college. The written work of some students contains spelling errors, is ungrammatical and is poorly presented.

Examples of students' achievements in construction, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	*	99	100
	Pass rate (%)	*	91	88
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	*	98	100
	Pass rate (%)	*	78	100
NVQ level 2	Retention (%)	73	86	87
	Pass rate (%)	23	22	18
NVQ level 3	Retention (%)	79	92	83
	Pass rate (%)	25	11	49

Source: college data

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

16 Inspectors observed 10 lessons. Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's identification of key strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors considered that a number of strengths had been understated.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- the identification, provision and monitoring of additional learning support
- informative marking and good standards of record-keeping
- effective course management
- high pass rates on many courses
- high standards of curriculum development

Weaknesses

- poor levels of retention on some courses
- some drab and uninspiring accommodation

17 A wide range of courses from foundation to level 4 meets the needs of students and local employers. Recently the demand for part-time courses has fallen, while that for full-time courses has increased, reflecting changes in the local job market. On some motor vehicle courses, teachers are able to give credit for the skills already acquired by students, enabling them to complete their programmes of study more quickly. The college recognises its success in recruiting female students. The portfolio of courses is regularly reviewed. Good links with the motor vehicle trade have led to the development of a two-year part-time course that enables students to gain both a technician and a craft qualification. Staff recognised the need for a formal cycle maintenance qualification and are

currently writing an NVQ specification for national accreditation.

18 Courses are effectively managed. The self-assessment report did not refer to the strength of curriculum team management. Course tutors meet fortnightly with the head of team to discuss course management. The college identified improvements in course documentation since the last inspection. The head of team makes good use of a computer database for maintaining records and forward planning. Unit costing is used to model possible changes in course provision.

19 Teachers use appropriate methods of teaching and learning which take account of the needs of their students. Inspectors consider that a strength understated in the self-assessment report is the high quality of additional learning support available to all students. All full-time and 20 per cent of day-release part-time students undertake assessments in numeracy, communications and spatial awareness. These are marked by course tutors who, with the college additional support co-ordinator, decide the most appropriate method of meeting each student's needs. The additional support teacher has both a motor vehicle qualification and a degree in English and she offers advice on technical matters and communication skills to students. The additional support is valued by students. Written work inspected was of a high standard. The college understated the thoroughness with which marking is carried out. Good use is made of a computer database to monitor students' overall performance.

20 Since the last inspection, the number of full-time teachers has fallen from 17 to 10 with part-time teachers now teaching about 40 per cent of lessons. Teachers and technicians are appropriately qualified. There is a sufficiently wide range of engineering equipment to meet course requirements. The motor vehicle workshop accommodation is well decorated and lit. By contrast, much of the other engineering accommodation is drab and uninspiring. The

Curriculum Areas

self-assessment report does not refer to any accommodation weaknesses.

21 Students produce work of a high standard in practical sessions. NVQ portfolios are well presented and organised. Students respond well to teachers' questions. Most students' written work is of a good standard but insufficient use is made of information technology (IT). The pass rates of many courses are above those listed in the FEFC curriculum area survey, *Engineering*. Inspectors agreed with the college that above average pass rates are achieved by students. Pass rates on several courses were 100 per cent in 1997; for example, the national certificate in electronics and the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) part 1 welding and fabrication course. However, on a few courses, a significant percentage of students leave their course early. In 1997, the lowest retention occurred on the two-year full-time and part-time advanced level courses. The college was insufficiently critical of retention on some courses. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of the need for more consistent tutorial and induction policies.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Intermediate vocational (first certificate, electronic servicing, fabrication and welding)	Retention (%)	59	58	75
	Pass rate (%)	53	60	68
Advanced vocational – full time (national diplomas)	Retention (%)	61	78	42
	Pass rate (%)	67	48	79
Advanced vocational – part time (national certificates)	Retention (%)	76	85	65
	Pass rate (%)	68	85	82
Higher national certificates	Retention (%)	91	85	82
	Pass rate (%)	70	100	100

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

22 Inspectors observed nine lessons covering business studies, management and professional courses. Business administration courses did not form part of the scope of the inspection. The self-assessment report for the curriculum area identifies many strengths and a few areas for development but some additional key weaknesses were identified by inspectors.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- rigorous assessment procedures
- effective course management
- students' written work of a high standard
- high pass rates on some vocational and professional courses

Weaknesses

- ineffective lesson planning and management in some lessons
- some students lack adequate communication and study skills
- limited co-ordination of the business curriculum across programme areas

23 There is a broad range of vocational, management and professional courses, including full-time and part-time GNVQs in business studies at intermediate and advanced level, a BTEC higher national certificate in business studies, NVQs at levels 2 to 4, and Institute of Export and Chartered Institute of Marketing courses. The National Examinations Board for Supervisory Management programme is offered on a modular basis.

24 Courses are effectively managed. Course documentation contains detailed and appropriate schemes of work. Lesson plans

generally give a clear indication of aims and objectives, although a few lacked detailed reference to learning outcomes. There is little co-ordination of the business curriculum across the three programme teams; for example, the sharing of good practice. This issue is not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

25 There are high standards of teaching. Inspectors agreed with the college that teachers used an appropriate range of teaching and learning methods to stimulate and maintain students' interest. In an Institute of Personnel and Development Certificate in Personnel Practice lesson, the teacher made effective use of questions and answers to consolidate learning. Teachers made full use of students' work experiences in most lessons. In a few less effective lessons, teachers did not take into account the range of their students' prior subject knowledge and study skills. In a minority of lessons, the teachers had not prepared enough materials to sustain the interest of some students, and left insufficient time to review progress.

26 Inspectors agreed that the area's assessment procedures are rigorous, and effectively implemented. There is clear course documentation which contains details of the integrated assignment programmes. The student course handbook gives an informative explanation of assessment procedures. The development of students' key skills in IT and communication has been addressed through an integrated assignment programme but the college acknowledges that key skills provision for part-time students is insufficient.

27 Teachers undertake suitable professional development. The college acknowledges that opening hours limit the students' access to IT equipment at Hampden Hall.

28 The quality of students' written work is of a good standard. GNVQ students' portfolios are well organised and presented, and demonstrate a high level of research skills. In the best

Curriculum Areas

classes, students were motivated and showed a good knowledge of their subjects. Some students lack adequate communication and study skills. This is not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Some good pass rates have been achieved on vocational and professional courses. Results for the GNVQ advanced business and a number of externally assessed examinations are above the national average. Completion rates are high for the National Examining Board for Supervisory Management Certificate in Supervisory Management and Institute of Personnel and Development Certificate in Personnel Practice. Pass rates for GNVQ advanced, NVQ levels 2 to 4, and professional courses declined in 1997 after significant improvements in 1996.

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced and BTEC higher national certificate	Retention (%)	66	68	67
	Pass rate (%)	44	86	84
NVQ levels 2 to 4	Retention (%)	76	82	83
	Pass rate (%)	35	51	42
Professional courses	Retention (%)	78	81	70
	Pass rate (%)	56	61	52

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 3

29 Inspectors observed 11 lessons across the range of health and social care programmes offered by the college. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements identified in the college's self-assessment report although some additional weaknesses were identified. The college's self-assessment report does not give sufficient weight to weaknesses in teaching methods.

Key strengths

- well-organised work experience
- rigorous system of internal verification
- effective recording and monitoring systems
- high pass rates on the majority of courses

Weaknesses

- teaching which is insufficiently challenging
- poor levels of retention on some courses
- poor achievement levels for some courses

30 The college has developed a broad range of health and social care courses since the last inspection, including GNVQs at foundation, intermediate and advanced level and the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) diploma and advanced diploma in nursery nursing. There is a growing area of NVQ provision in childcare at levels 2 and 3. The college has identified NVQs as a priority area for further development and, in September 1997, the CACHE certificate course was replaced by a full-time NVQ level 2 programme in childcare and education. The level of enrolment for GNVQ courses is declining. In 1997, the GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses

failed to attract sufficient applicants and the first and second years of the advanced course have been combined.

31 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that lessons have clear aims and objectives and that schemes of work are detailed and informative. In the majority of lessons, teachers taught at too slow a pace and students failed to make effective use of the time available. In several lessons, learning activities did not sufficiently challenge the more able students. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. Teachers and NVQ assessors use effective systems for recording and monitoring students' progress and there is a consistent and rigorous process of internal verification. Students are able to make clear links between their experience in the work place and the learning activities in college.

32 Inspectors agreed with the college that courses provide appropriate progression routes for students. Staff maintain comprehensive course files and hold regular team meetings. There is effective course review and evaluation and appropriate action is taken to remedy areas of concern and ensure that the development, for example in NVQs, of course provision meets employers' requirements.

33 The accommodation used for all courses is generally good. Most teaching rooms are grouped together on one floor and provide easy access to learning materials. Rooms are spacious and well furnished and can be used for a range of teaching and learning activities. There are sufficient facilities for craft work and other forms of practical activity.

34 Students' assignments are well organised and some are of a high quality. The better examples include well-presented portfolios and observation files which make good use of IT and photographs. In higher level courses, there are examples of well-referenced and evaluative assignments. As the college notes, most courses have high pass rates and GNVQ intermediate

Curriculum Areas

health and social care pass rates are significantly above the national average. Pass rates for the NVQ level 2 childcare and education programme were poor in 1997. Few students who complete the national diploma course in dental nursing choose to enter for the examination. Some courses have poor levels of retention and those for GNVQ provision and for NVQ level 2 childcare courses are significantly below the college's own targets.

Examples of students' achievements in health and social care, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	Retention (%)	56	54	69
	Pass rate (%)	50	71	89
NVQ level 2 childcare and education	Retention (%)	77	50	64
	Pass rate (%)	60	75	22
CACHE certificate in childcare and education	Retention (%)	76	83	82
	Pass rate (%)	92	95	88
CACHE diploma in nursery nursing	Retention (%)	85	93	100
	Pass rate (%)	86	96	72

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Hairdressing and Beauty

Grade 2

35 Inspectors observed 10 lessons. Inspectors agreed with the main findings in the college's self-assessment report but identified some weaknesses not listed by the college.

Key strengths

- comprehensive range of learning programmes with clear routes for progression
- effective use of question and answer techniques by teachers
- good level of practical skills demonstrated by students
- high retention rates on most courses
- high pass rates on non-NVQ programmes
- effective curriculum management

Weaknesses

- teachers' failure to link theory and practice with industrial standards in some lessons
- missed opportunities to build on students' experiences in the workplace to enhance learning
- low attendance rates in most lessons observed

36 Inspectors agreed with the college that the programme area offers a broad range of courses. These meet a range of individual students' and employer needs, providing clear routes for progression from NVQ levels 1 to 3. There is also a more specialised range of complementary therapy and media make-up courses.

37 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the quality of teaching is high. Teaching and learning is planned to meet the

needs of individual students, and appropriate lesson plans and schemes of work are available in all lessons. Teachers share lesson aims and objectives with students. In some lessons, teachers used stimulating question and answer techniques effectively to challenge students and ensure that they all contributed to the learning process. Positive student/teacher relationships helped students to achieve their learning goals. Frequent checks on students' progress took place in the majority of lessons and appropriate feedback was given. Assessment of students' written and practical work is accurate and encourages students to improve their work. In a few lessons, teachers failed to relate theory and practice to industrial standards, for example, in relation to treatment timings, costs and the development of client care skills. Teachers also missed opportunities to build on students' experiences in the workplace to improve the commercial realism of the practical work. Attendance rates are low in most classes; there were not more than 10 students in any of the classes inspected. These key weaknesses were not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

38 The college acknowledges that key skills are not yet fully embedded across all programmes and that accredited courses for IT skills are available only to full-time students. The standard of students' written work is satisfactory. There is some evidence that students on full-time courses use IT effectively to improve the presentation of their written work.

39 The curriculum area is well managed. Teachers are clear about their responsibilities and there are systems to help part-time staff to become effective members of course teams. Procedures for setting targets and monitoring progress are adopted systematically by course teams. No member of staff has yet achieved the training and development lead body accreditation of prior learning adviser award. This is recognised by the college as a weakness.

Curriculum Areas

40 Students carried out practical work safely and competently and demonstrated a high level of practical skills in most classes. Imaginative work was produced by students on the hairdressing and media make-up course, in a project assignment to research and recreate a piece of 'period make-up', in order to meet the requirements and standards of a client's brief. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there are high levels of retention on most courses and that pass rates are above national averages for non-NVQ programmes. For example, 100 per cent of students passed the International Therapy and Examination Council anatomy, physiology and massage course in 1995-96 and 1996-97. Pass rates are less satisfactory for NVQ levels 2 and 3 in beauty therapy.

Examples of students' achievements in hairdressing and beauty, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
NVQ levels 1 and 2 hairdressing	Retention (%)	61	63	84
	Pass rate (%)	52	53	69
NVQ levels 2 and 3 beauty therapy	Retention (%)	96	94	76
	Pass rate (%)	83	73	52
Non-NVQ beauty and complementary therapy courses	Retention (%)	93	93	95
	Pass rate (%)	77	92	75

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

English, Sociology, Psychology and Law

Grade 4

41 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. The inspection covered English language, sociology, psychology and law at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and English literature, sociology, psychology and law at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level). Inspectors did not wholly agree with the judgements expressed in the self-assessment report. They found some strengths and weaknesses not identified in the report and placed greater weight upon some of the weaknesses identified. In some parts of the report, strengths and weaknesses contradicted one another.

Key strengths

- well-organised teaching in the better lessons

Weaknesses

- failure of teachers to set challenging work for students
- the poor levels of students' attendance
- failure to meet students' additional learning needs
- the worsening trend in pass rates
- the low retention on many courses
- little integration of IT with the curriculum

42 Full-time day and part-time evening courses are offered. Some part-time students also join daytime classes. The programme of observation of teaching and learning, an integral part of the self-assessment process, has been helpful in spreading good practice. The better lessons were generally well planned with clear aims and objectives. Lesson plans were

consistently used, as stated in the self-assessment report. Teachers make effective use of a variety of teaching methods, including whole class teaching, small group work and question and answer sessions which tested and extended students' understanding. Photocopied extracts were widely used, although there was little use of audiovisual aids. In less successful lessons the pace of work was slow and teachers failed to set students sufficiently challenging tasks. In a few lessons, teachers had some problems in classroom management. Inspectors considered that this weakness was understated in the self-assessment report. Students' work was marked to an appropriate standard but tutors' comments did not fully explain how students could improve their future performance. Inspectors did not agree with the college's view that IT was integrated with other aspects of the curriculum. In practice, few students took up opportunities to improve their IT skills and some stated that they had no IT skills. Students' attendance was poor, averaging 55 per cent in lessons observed. There were some improvements in the reporting of students' absences, in response to the action plan.

43 The college acknowledged that GCSE and GCE A level students' needs for additional learning support were not being fully met, even after they had been identified. Targets set for students' retention and achievement are not effectively monitored. New courses have been introduced to meet the needs of students. The introduction of modular GCE A levels enables students to take GCE advanced supplementary (AS) in their first year. In spite of some improvements to the tutorial programme, attendance at tutorials remains low. In some cases, students are not able to attend.

44 Teaching accommodation is fit for its purpose. However, many rooms are bleak and there is relatively little display, particularly of students' work. There are sufficient library resources for the courses.

Curriculum Areas

45 Pass rates in many cases were below the average for further education colleges. Pass rates in GCE A level subjects had declined in the last two years and are now well below average for the sector. Students' achievements in GCSE English language and literature were near to the sector average but achievements in other GCSE subjects had declined recently to below the sector average. The college acknowledged that retention rates were low, commonly around 60 per cent, and have declined in the last two years.

Examples of students' achievements in English, sociology, psychology and law, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCSE English language and English literature	Retention (%)	98	57	52
	Pass rate (%)	50	64	65
GCSE law, sociology and psychology	Retention (%)	96	65	46
	Pass rate (%)	48	44	29
GCE A level English literature	Retention (%)	95	55	54
	Pass rate (%)	90	76	68
GCE A level law	Retention (%)	97	63	72
	Pass rate (%)	68	61	53
GCE A level sociology	Retention (%)	63	45	62
	Pass rate (%)	59	77	33
GCE A level psychology	Retention (%)	87	39	53
	Pass rate (%)	67	68	69

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Languages

Grade 2

46 Inspectors observed 13 lessons covering four languages and English as a foreign language (EFL) at different levels. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that the college had understated the overall quality of languages provision.

Key strengths

- a well-managed EFL programme and outstanding teaching
- good monitoring of students' progress
- effective additional support by teachers outside the classroom
- high retention and pass rates on EFL courses
- the wide range of courses that meets the needs of many different students
- good specialist equipment

Weaknesses

- the declining pass rates in GCE A level and GCSE courses over the past three years
- low retention rates on some courses

47 Languages are organised as a section within the management/professional/care programme area team. The languages section offers a large number of part-time and full-time courses. Customised short courses for business are offered and there is some work in the local prison. The college recognises that EFL courses have been a particularly successful recent development. A large number of adult students attend language courses to extend their skills rather than to gain a qualification.

48 Inspectors agreed with the college that the quality of teaching in the section has many strengths and that students work purposefully

on materials carefully prepared by staff.

Well-produced schemes of work are in place for all courses. In most lessons observed the teaching was appropriate and students were challenged by the work set. In an EFL class in which students from 18 nationalities took part in a lively debate about health and food the teacher made effective use of questions and answers. Most teachers use varied approaches to maintain students' interest, but in some lessons observed, students' attention wandered and teachers failed to provide work which motivated all the students sufficiently. Students are well supported by staff. One EFL teacher helps a Spanish-speaking Catholic priest to write his sermons in English. Students attending the customised short courses for business were complimentary about the support they received. The college recognises that students' work is carefully assessed and progress is monitored through regular reports. Students commented that they find this helpful. In some GCE A level French and German classes student attendance was less than 50 per cent.

49 Specialist rooms are generally well equipped with television and video facilities and high-quality listening stations in the language laboratory. Students do not have open access to these facilities. Inspectors did not agree with the college that there are adequate resources for topic work in the library. Five teachers are native speakers of the language they teach.

50 Students' achievements in GCE A level French were above the national average in 1995 and 1996 but fell just below the national average in 1997. Pass rates at GCSE were above the national average in 1995 but the college acknowledges that results have since declined and reasons are being sought for this deterioration. The college believes that a change in syllabus may account for the declining GCE A level results in 1997. Retention is low on some GCE A level courses. Students' achievements in EFL are consistently high: the pass rate in 1995 and 1997 was 85 per cent.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in languages, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCSE French	Retention (%)	45	33	92
	Pass rate (%)	80	57	33
GCE A level French	Retention (%)	100	56	100
	Pass rate (%)	86	71	67
EFL	Retention (%)	*	79	96
	Pass rate (%)	85	81	85

Source: college data

*data not available

Curriculum Areas

Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 3

51 Inspectors observed nine lessons. Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's assessment of its provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In a few instances, the self-assessment report understates strengths and weaknesses and contains some contradictory statements.

Key strengths

- appropriate teaching and learning activities
- effective management of learning for students with profound learning difficulties
- accredited courses
- excellent collaboration with the Health Trust in support of adults with profound learning difficulties

Weaknesses

- some lessons too long for students
- lack of relevant specialist teaching qualifications among staff
- lack of initial assessment and individual action-planning and review
- failure to apply the college admissions system to students on specialist programmes

52 The college justifiably claims as a strength a diverse range of courses. These include: special school link programmes in construction, engineering technology and hair and beauty; a broad range of provision for adults with profound and complex learning difficulties who are resident in a long-stay hospital; and courses for those with severe learning difficulties. One

course, 'Pathways', is for students who have had a poor prior experience of school and who have particular social and psychological support needs.

53 Management of the specialist provision for students with profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been effective. However, because other specialist programmes are managed separately there is little cohesion between programmes. Students have few opportunities to progress between programmes or learn with other students pursuing similar activities. There is a lack of initial assessment, individual action-planning and review. These weaknesses are acknowledged by the college. There is an effective monitoring system for pathway students which includes regular review of their progress and target-setting. The college admissions system is not applied to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on specialist programmes. There is no assessment of students' additional support needs and achievements prior to starting a college course. This lack of rigour in assessment is recognised by the college.

54 In most lessons, teaching is appropriate and actively engages students. A few lesson plans do not indicate what students will do or what they will learn, nor do they differentiate teaching and learning activities for individual students. Some lessons were too long to maintain students' interest. Students on specialist programmes do not have formal tutorials. These weaknesses are not identified in the self-assessment report. Several students moved on to other courses and eight out of 15 pathways students progressed to intermediate programmes in September 1997. There is effective collaboration with the Health Trust to support adults with profound and complex learning difficulties who are resident at Manor House Hospital. There is a lack of effective communication between college curriculum teams and this results in ineffective monitoring of students' progress. This leads to students

Curriculum Areas

who have previously attended the college on special school link programmes repeating activities when they enrol on specialist programmes.

55 Some staff who teach on specialist programmes are working towards assessor and basic skills awards and British Sign Language qualifications. However, no staff have appropriate specialist teaching qualifications. The significance of this was not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Some accommodation used by the specialist programmes at Hampden Hall does not provide an inspiring learning environment.

56 Students develop appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding through watching demonstrations, classroom activities and written work. Students generally understand the purpose of their studies. There are accredited courses which offer all students opportunities to gain awards. In 1996-97 the pass rate on the Pathways course was 54 per cent, over 10 per cent above the national average. Students on the specialist programmes have gained units of the National Proficiency Testing Council in independent living. These achievements have been understated by the college.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

57 The college has made improvements in this area since its last inspection. Inspectors agreed with the main findings in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- well-designed initial guidance procedures
- effective induction programmes
- well-planned tutorial programme
- the quality of individual additional learning support
- effective careers guidance

Weaknesses

- insufficient course information prior to enrolment
- the uneven provision of additional learning support
- some poor tutorials

58 The college has strong links with schools. Staff attend schools' careers events, offer 'taster' sessions for pupils, and provide link course provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Guidance is a standard part of the interview process but is also available to all enquirers. Initial guidance procedures are well structured. The college acknowledges that students sometimes receive insufficient information about the course and the workload they might expect before they start.

59 Inspectors agreed with the college that induction programmes are effective in giving students clear information about the college and course requirements. Induction is managed by course teams, and covers common elements such as study skills. Induction is evaluated effectively. Most curriculum teams organise

induction for students who join courses late. Students feel well informed about college services and know who to contact for assistance. The student handbook is a helpful guide to college services.

60 Teachers and personal tutors provide good support to individual students. Inspectors agreed with the college that there is an effective tutorial programme. Since the last inspection, a clear policy on support for students and a stronger framework for tutorials has been introduced. Full-time students receive a weekly one-hour tutorial from a personal tutor who is also likely to be one of their teachers. For part-time courses, the course tutor acts as personal tutor. The college has an informative tutor handbook with a comprehensive pack of resources. The handbook suggests key items to be included in tutorials. There have been well-attended staff training events to encourage effective tutorials. The handbook and resource pack are not yet thoroughly used across the college and some students still receive poor tutorials. This inconsistent practice is noted as a weakness by the college.

61 The provision of additional learning support has improved since the last inspection. Students receive effective individual additional learning support and, as noted in the college's self-assessment report, some of it is exceptional. The screening process to identify students' additional learning support requirements is thorough. All full-time and many part-time students are tested to assess their basic skills in mathematics and English during induction. Different tests are used to provide detailed information to course tutors, and to identify students requiring additional learning support. The tests have not yet been adapted to meet the requirements of particular courses. Additional learning support is managed by the curriculum teams. Students requiring additional learning support are also identified from application forms, at interview, and by teachers, or they can refer themselves. Learning support teaching is

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provided through double staffed lessons, individual help, small group help or through attendance at a key skills workshop. Some of this teaching is of high quality. However, additional learning support is provided unevenly across the college; course teams provide widely differing levels of support to students. A few students receive effective help with their coursework but little development of their basic skills. The college acknowledges that the new additional learning support procedures are not yet fully reviewed and evaluated.

62 Students receive good personal support. Qualified staff provide an effective counselling service. The counselling service is well advertised, valued by students and conforms to British Association of Counselling standards. Effective financial advice is given and, in the autumn term 1997, over 150 students were given individual help on financial matters. The college provides financial help through student support funds, and also helps students to apply to local trusts and charities. Inspectors agreed that counselling and welfare advice in the college is a strength. The college nursery has 30 full-time places. It is centrally located and well used by students. The college provides the student union with an office and pays for agreed activities including attendance by student union officers at National Union of Students conferences and training activities. There has been a student advisory forum and there are plans to establish a student council

63 Students receive effective careers education and guidance, and this is recognised in the college's self-assessment report. The local careers service provides weekly guidance sessions and this is enhanced by guidance provided by the college careers co-ordinator. The careers library is well developed and based in the library and the careers room. There is a high level of careers guidance given during induction, in the tutorial programme and at college events. Careers staff work closely with other support services in the college; for

example, by referring students for counselling and additional learning support.

General Resources

Grade 3

64 There have been significant improvements to accommodation and IT equipment since the last inspection. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the high standard of the refurbished accommodation
- a wide range of specialist accommodation
- planned maintenance and redecoration programmes
- good IT equipment

Weaknesses

- the inadequate library at Hampden Hall
- the lack of qualified staff to provide IT support to students
- the low use of some accommodation and computer facilities
- poor social facilities for students

65 Inspection confirmed that some accommodation has been successfully adapted to meet changes in the curriculum. There is a 10-year planned maintenance programme with costed plans for the first five years. The three-year redecoration programme is reviewed annually. The monthly general maintenance plan is carefully monitored. Nearly all classrooms and computer rooms have been refurbished to a high standard. The majority of rooms have whiteboards and overhead projectors but a few do not have screens or blinds. Audiovisual equipment is effectively

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managed centrally. Some accommodation used for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is poorly decorated and does not provide a stimulating learning environment. Accommodation is clean and well maintained. The college reception area provides a welcoming focus for visitors. Directional signs around the college are being improved but are not always prominently located.

66 Inspectors concurred that there is a wide range of specialist accommodation. The college acknowledges that some of the specialist accommodation would benefit from refurbishment and that some is too small for the number of students. The self-assessment report highlights the need for additional equipment in some areas to meet curriculum demands. There is a detailed assets register and curriculum areas maintain equipment inventories. The college does not have a planned rolling programme for the updating and replacement of equipment. General classrooms and computer rooms are timetabled centrally and specialist workshops are managed by curriculum areas. A few temporary classrooms of poor quality are used for teaching. The college acknowledges that systems are not in place to monitor the effective use of accommodation, and this was confirmed by inspectors. Staff work rooms are adequate and staff have good access to computers.

67 The refurbished library provides a pleasant learning environment with 66 study places, seven computers and a well-resourced careers library. The college identified that there is insufficient space for a silent study area. Inspectors agreed that the library bookstock has been rationalised and old bookstock removed. There is an extensive range of over 200 periodicals and a bookstock of approximately 12,000. However, the numbers of books are inadequate to meet the needs of students in some curriculum areas. There is a small stock of videos and a growing range of CD-ROM database titles. Although book issue statistics

are recorded, students' use of the library is not monitored. There are 29 computers and 40 study places in the open access workshop which are well used by students. The college acknowledges that there are not enough qualified staff to help students make effective use of computer software. Students can book time in the key skills workshop which has 16 computers and where there is individual tutor support. There are limited evening open hours to the library and computers on the main site at Oxford Road. Library bookstock at Hampden Hall is inadequate for the course needs of students.

68 There has been a substantial increase in the number and quality of computers since the last inspection. The strategy for IT confirms a commitment to its further development. The computer users' group provides a useful forum to address curriculum related IT issues. Most computers are of a high specification and have a range of up-to-date software. There are 260 computers for student use and about 15 per cent of these are available on open access. In addition, 130 computers are available for staff use. Computing resources are dispersed across the college to encourage greater use of computers in the curriculum. College figures record low use in some areas. An academic network manager has responsibility for the academic network resources and an information systems manager for the administrative network.

69 The self-assessment report acknowledges that wheelchair users are unable to gain entry to most of the specialist hair and beauty therapy facilities as there is no lift. There is suitable access to other areas of the college for wheelchair users. The college has carried out an access survey, recommendations have been prioritised, and some minor improvements have been completed.

70 Social facilities for students are poor, with the result that the college refectory also acts as a communal area. The main college refectory is

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barely adequate; long queues of students form at peak times. There is a 30-place nursery for the children of students, staff and the public. Students have access to a well-equipped sports hall, fitness gym, playing field and a tennis court. There is ample car parking at both sites. Some improvement has been made to site security by improved lighting and closed-circuit television. Some entrances to the college are untidy. There is a commitment in the self-assessment report to improve the appearance of the public areas of the college.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

71 There have been improvements in quality assurance since the last inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements identified in the college's self-assessment report, although some additional weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- strong commitment to continuous improvement of the quality of provision
- a coherent framework for assuring the quality of the curriculum
- use of course review outcomes to establish staff development priorities

Weaknesses

- little use of targets and standards to measure quality improvements
- no monitoring of college charter commitments
- the lack of a comprehensive quality assurance manual

72 Inspectors agreed with the college that quality assurance arrangements have improved significantly since the last inspection. The self-assessment process was led by programme team managers for the curriculum areas, and

senior college managers for cross-college areas. Training sessions on the self-assessment process were attended by governors, staff, and representatives from local businesses and other agencies. Self-assessment is viewed positively by staff. The college places a strong emphasis on assuring the quality of its provision and services. Commitments on quality assurance are made in the mission statement. The quality assurance framework consists of policies and procedures which are used to improve and monitor systematically all college activity. The procedures meet the requirements of external examining, validating and awarding bodies, and the college places a high priority on external verifiers' reports. Reports are received by the senior manager with responsibility for the curriculum, and weaknesses identified in reports are considered by the appropriate curriculum team. The senior manager with responsibility for quality assurance and students responds to priorities set by the policy statement on quality.

73 A revised system of curriculum review was introduced in 1996. Standard documentation is used to support annual course team reviews. There is an interim review of the progress made on the previous year's course action plans. Course reviews contain insufficient analysis of students' achievements and make no references to targets. Whilst the self-assessment report acknowledges that the college lacks experience in target-setting and recording achievement, these other weaknesses were not identified. The views of employers are not gathered systematically and do not inform the course review process. This weakness was not identified by the college. Annual course reviews are received by the quality assurance group which produces a summary with action plans. The report is discussed at the academic board, the principal's management group, and the governors' student and curriculum committee. There is effective monitoring by the quality assurance group of action taken.

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74 To assist in the assessment of their performance, all functional teams in the college have developed service standards. Some of the better sets of standards, for example those produced in counselling, encourage continuous improvement. Standards written by some other teams are less comprehensive. Teams have assessed their performance against these standards, produced action plans and brought about improvements. There is no overarching quality manual, updated on a regular basis, that describes quality assurance procedures for teaching and support staff. These weaknesses were not identified by the college's self-assessment report.

75 The commitment to quality assurance is emphasised in the college charter. The charter is issued to all students at enrolment and discussed in detail during induction. The charter makes explicit commitments to standards of service; for example, it explains the college complaints procedures. The charter was revised recently following comments from schools, students, employers and the corporation. Students showed a high awareness of the existence and significance of the charter. Commitments within the charter on administrative procedures are included in the service standards of appropriate functional teams. Teaching teams do not assess how effectively they fulfil commitments made in the charter to standards of teaching and learning. The self-assessment report did not identify this weakness.

76 The college was recognised as an Investor in People in December 1997. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that staff development is a strength. All teaching and support staff are appraised annually. Appraisal procedures are clear and well documented, and they are valued by staff. The appraisal process, together with course review and development plans, contributes to the advancement of staff development priorities. Teaching observation has been part of the appraisal process since 1995. A pilot graded teaching and learning

observation scheme for full-time and part-time teachers was introduced as part of the college's self-assessment process. This has led to improvements in lesson plans and schemes of work.

Governance

Grade 2

77 The strengths and weaknesses of governance identified in the college's self-assessment report generally accord with the inspection team's judgements. However, weaknesses in governance in relation to internal audit are not acknowledged.

Key strengths

- well-qualified governors with appropriate expertise
- appropriate participation by governors in strategic planning
- effective control of the college's financial affairs
- efficient conduct of college business through the board and its committees
- productive working relationship with senior managers

Weaknesses

- inadequate monitoring of students' achievements and curriculum issues
- underdeveloped procedures for assessing the board's own performance
- ineffective operation of the audit committee

78 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

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79 Corporation members have professional and business backgrounds which enable them to guide the college effectively. The remuneration committee appraises the principal annually. Governors work closely with other senior managers. The inspection team concurred with the college's assessment that governors actively participate in the development of the college's strategic plan. Members of the planning committee participated directly in the plan's formulation and the full corporation debated that committee's recommendations prior to its acceptance. There is effective financial analysis of the plan and monitoring of its progress by the finance and general purposes committee.

80 Governors conduct the business of the college efficiently through the work of the board. Committee minutes and papers are considered at full board meetings and all members are able to comment on recommendations. The corporation has recently reorganised its committee structure, reducing their number and changing names and terms of reference. It has prioritised key areas for development which include the conduct of its own affairs and improved monitoring of curriculum issues and students' achievements. The newly-created curriculum and student committee has given priority to governor involvement in quality assurance issues, curricular developments in the college and, specifically, the analysis of students' achievements. The college recognises that this had not been fully established prior to the inspection. Standing orders have been recently adopted by the corporation and their operation is untested. The college has a register of interests but the college acknowledges that this has not yet been completed by all governors. Not all relevant areas of interests are required to be declared under the register. Senior members of staff, other than the principal as a governor, are not required to complete the register.

81 The newly-established governance committee has taken on search responsibilities for filling the three vacancies. The college's self-assessment report acknowledges a concern

to redress the current gender imbalance in membership where there are only two women on a board of 17 members. The committee has attempted unsuccessfully to find a representative from the local minority ethnic community and is also seeking a qualified, experienced accountant for the audit committee. The college recognises that current arrangements for assessing the board's own performance and effectiveness are underdeveloped. The governance committee is taking action on this weakness.

82 The audit committee is ineffective but this is not recognised in the self-assessment report. The audit committee has not operated in accordance with its terms of reference. At its infrequent meetings, it has not actively advised the corporation on the approval of internal audit plans or the results of audit and it has not monitored implementation of audit recommendations. The internal audit plans for 1997-98 provide only for some limited coverage of non-financial systems but various committees have accepted executive responsibility for the delivery of these audits.

Management

Grade 3

83 The college's self-assessment report analyses the effectiveness of management clearly and objectively. The inspection team agreed broadly with the college's overall assessment of its strengths and weaknesses in management.

Key strengths

- unit targets consistently achieved
- clear planning cycle linked to strategic objectives
- improved and effective communications throughout the college
- staffing expenditure and vacancies closely monitored against strategic objectives

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Weaknesses

- failure of information systems to meet fully the requirements of managers
- unreliable data on students' achievements
- failure of some managers to use performance indicators and target-setting
- ineffective implementation of the equal opportunities policy in some areas

84 The college has met its target of funded units in each of the last three years. Progress towards these targets is carefully monitored by senior managers. All full-time staff attend a strategic planning day, and a summary of the strategic plan is widely circulated. There are good links between the strategic and operational plans. At curriculum programme level, development plans do not contain sufficiently rigorous measurable targets. This weakness is understated in the self-assessment report.

85 The executive team consists of the principal, a director of finance and four assistant principals who are responsible for learning resources, curriculum, student services and personnel, respectively. The college recognises the need to improve some aspects of college management and a post-inspection review of structure is planned. The post of assistant principal, curriculum, is a temporary arrangement designed to co-ordinate management of the curriculum. This has led to improvements but some aspects of curriculum management are not effective. For example, the integration of IT with the curriculum and a lack of clarity in arrangements for the management of additional learning support are not highlighted by the self-assessment report. The curriculum and support staff managers work well as a team and are developing managerial skills by working together towards an NVQ level 4 award in management.

86 Procedures and policies are reviewed through working groups. For example, the equal opportunities policy has been recently revised and endorsed by the academic board and the corporation. The college acknowledges, however, that the equal opportunities policy is not being effectively implemented across all areas of provision. For example, there is a lack of progress in achieving more balanced gender recruitment to some courses. Some college documents use inappropriate language to describe students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

87 Following the last inspection report, the college acknowledged that communications throughout the college were poor. A cross-college communications working party developed a new set of procedures. Inspectors endorsed the view in the self-assessment report that these recommendations have resulted in improved and effective communications throughout the college. The principal's monthly college newsletter is widely read and informative. Comprehensive biographies of corporation members form a useful occasional feature. Working committees and teams meet regularly. Meetings have clear agendas, but occasionally some decisions are not clearly minuted. Most staff use electronic mail effectively to communicate with others working in the college. A new telephone system is planned to provide telephone conferencing between sites and other facilities.

88 Procedures for course management are generally effective and are supported by comprehensive course documentation. Course teams meet regularly. Budgets for staffing, consumable materials and staff development are delegated to programme team managers. Inspectors were able to confirm the college claim that staffing vacancies and expenditure are closely monitored against efficiency targets and strategic objectives. There is evidence of posts being transferred from declining to growth areas, for example, from engineering to sports

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studies. Some new non-teaching posts, for example, as an internal assessor/verifier, have been created to increase efficiency.

89 The self-assessment report recognises considerable weaknesses in the provision of management information to support curriculum and other managers but some of the implications are understated. Information on students' achievements is unreliable and its importance to the organisation is not clearly or widely understood. Some curriculum managers keep their own records which do not match the centrally-held data and, in some cases, were also found to be unreliable. The college acknowledges that the use of performance indicators and target-setting is not comprehensive. Accurate and timely data on other than financial matters are not routinely available.

90 Inspectors agreed that there is appropriate liaison with external bodies. In particular there are strong links with the Thames Valley TEC, the LEA, and the local careers education and guidance service. The college recognises that not all programme teams have effective links with employers. The academic board has conducted a review of these links but the results to date are inconclusive. The college's strategic development is informed by increasingly effective market research.

91 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. Comprehensive monthly financial reports are prepared which are distributed to members of the principal's management group. Budget holders receive timely reports on income and expenditure and additional information as required. Financial regulations have recently been updated. The college's internal auditors were unable to give assurance on the state of internal control in the college's student management information systems when they reviewed this area in 1995-96. No comprehensive report on these systems by the

internal auditors has since been secured by the college.

Conclusions

92 Despite the newness of the self-assessment process, the inspection team found the self-assessment report detailed and evaluative, providing a useful basis for carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the findings in the college's self-assessment report. Inspectors considered that some weaknesses were not identified by the college, and conversely, that the significance of some strengths, particularly in relation to teaching and learning, were overemphasised. Inspectors agreed with all grades awarded by the college for cross-college provision. Of the eight curriculum grades, two were graded by inspectors as higher and three lower than the college's self-assessment report.

93 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (February 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	11
16-18 years	24
19-24 years	14
25+ years	51
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (February 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	15
Intermediate	46
Advanced	26
Higher education	3
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	10
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (February 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	31	645	12
Agriculture	6	257	5
Construction	68	100	3
Engineering	67	437	9
Business	135	1,618	29
Hotel and catering	115	205	6
Health and community care	232	494	13
Art and design	38	97	2
Humanities	167	830	17
Basic education	89	136	4
Total	948	4,819	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (February 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	101	31	0	132
Supporting direct learning contact	53	1	0	54
Other support	54	1	0	55
Total	208	33	0	241

Source: college data, rounded to nearest full-time equivalent

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£8,049,000	£8,486,000	£8,887,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£16.17	£15.92	£16.63
Payroll as a proportion of income	73%	66%	61%
Achievement of funding target	100%	104%	(est) 100%
Diversity of income	40%	34%	37%
Operating surplus	-£269,000	£31,000	£153,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), college (1996-97)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	87	75	89
	Average point score per entry	2.9	2.4	2.6
	Position in tables	bottom third	bottom third	bottom third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	144	93	118
	Percentage achieving qualification	65%	89%	54%
	Position in tables	bottom third	top third	bottom third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	97	69
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	84%	59%
	Position in tables	*	top third	middle third

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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